

Idaho Giant Salamander

Dicamptodon aterrimus
Family Dicamptodontidae



Global Rank: G3

State Rank: S3 (ID); SH (MT)

Distribution: Known from central Idaho and two locations in western Montana.

Description: Adult Idaho giant salamanders reach up to 13 in. (33 cm.) in total length. Key characteristics include bulky head and body with muscular legs; light tan or bronze fine-grained marbling patterns on a dark brown or black background; and vertical grooves along sides are inconspicuous. Terrestrial adults are uncommon. Larvae reach up to 14 in. (35 cm.) in total length. Key characteristics are large size; small, bushy external gills; brown coloration with yellowish patches on back and sides; and a dorsal fin which starts at or behind the hind legs. The larvae may be locally common and may need to be in water for their gills to be visible. Most salamanders are voiceless, but adults of both the Idaho and Pacific giant salamanders are known to emit a low-pitched yelp when captured.

Reproduction: Breeding occurs in both spring and fall, usually in clear, cold streams. Large



*Current range of the
Idaho giant salamander*

larvae sometimes become sexually mature and breed. Between 135 and 200 unpigmented eggs are laid singly and attached beneath logs or rocks. Eggs may be guarded by the adult females.

Food: Adults eat terrestrial invertebrates, small snakes, shrews, mice, and salamanders. Larvae feed on a wide variety of aquatic invertebrates and some small vertebrates such as fishes, tadpoles, and other larval salamanders.

Habits: Adults are usually found under rocks, bark, and logs in humid forests near mountain streams, or on rocky shores of mountain lakes. Larvae usually inhabit clear, cold streams, but are also found in mountain lakes and ponds. Terrestrial adults are seldom seen and are most active on warm, rainy nights.

Management Implications: The salamander is fairly common in suitable habitat in central Idaho, but are only known from two locations in Montana. Protection and frequent monitoring of those locations would seem important.

Important References: Groves, C.R., B. Butterfield, A. Lippincott, B. Csuti, and J.M. Scott. 1997. Atlas of Idaho's wildlife. Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Boise, ID; Peterson, C.R., and H.J. Fabian. 1997. Photographic identification cards for Idaho amphibians. Herpetology Laboratory, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID; Reichel, J., and D. Flath. 1995. Identification of Montana's amphibians and reptiles. Montana Outdoors (May/June), Helena, MT.